

LOOKING FOR THE FUTURE

The Likhachov Scientific Conference has been addressing the topic of the future for the third year in a row. Taking into account the fact that hundreds of humanities scholars from various fields of knowledge and different countries assemble for the Conference, this concentration as such can be considered a symptom of the future becoming a challenge, the source of pain not letting a contemporary individual and his social system up.

1.

In 2017, in my report *The Future with No Future*, I tried to offer my diagnosis, the essence of which in the updated and corrected variant can be summed up as the following theses:

– it's necessary to distinguish the future as an aspect of physical time from the future as a social (historical) category, in the second case it includes not the whole formal aggregate of events taking place after the moment from which calculations are made and which is specified as the present, but only those of them that are the negation of the present by their content and value-load, its qualitative transformation;

– the social future is not something real, something hidden from us and looming in front condition, which we want to achieve, it exists only in the modus of a possibility, not in the sense that it can be various, it is itself only an opportunity, there is none of it in isolation from the subjects whose future it is, and exists only in the form of their expectations, active aspirations and goals to the extent in which the latter express their dissatisfaction with the present and go beyond its borders;

– the focus in social time is not a permanent feature of human societies (prehistoric ages, when there was no such focus, lasted much longer than historical time periods), and aiming at the future is a recent acquisition – a feature of the new European civilization developing under the sign of progress and understanding the future not only as what comes after what there is but also what should without fail be different, principally better than it;

– the idea of progress, specified as a democratic restructuring of the society, belief in the power of the mind and world-transforming role of technology, was the main spiritual force that drove people in their fight against the class and feudal state system, for achievements in science, culture, technologies, civil life practice, human development that in aggregate make what is called capitalist (Western) civilization;

– the state of affairs changed when capitalism won, and the issue of progress, social future became the issue of the future of capitalism itself: the idea of progress split into two lines – guarding and evolutionary proceeding from the conviction that capitalism has unlimited possibilities for evolution on its own basis, as well as revolutionary and critical aimed at overthrowing capitalism in favour of communist brotherhood of all people and nations;

– ideological confrontation in relation to the future of capitalism after the Russian revolution of 1917 won and building the socialist society without private property and market economy originally in the form of one state (USSR) and after World War II a whole number of states from the socialist bloc, took the form of an open struggle of two systems that was the struggle of two lines of social development. One of them was aimed at continuing history in the direction of just life arrangement, the second proceeded from its principal completeness at the bourgeois and democratic peak. The victory of capitalism (no matter how it is called – late capitalism, information society, postindustrial society, etc.) in this struggle brought it the guaranteed future as the main trophy. This future is understood as prolongation of the present, though regularly improved but unchangeable in its basic principles, in a nutshell, the future with no future as physical duration, as “after” but not a qualitative change, not as “another”, was interpreted and fixed in public consciousness of victors as proof of falseness of the very ideas about the ideal society.

2.

There is a lot of evidence that ideas of the social future have lost the power of driving motives for societal development. The age of unions and confrontations of social movements and states based of the difference of ideologies, social

arrangements and declared historical aims is gone (or ending). Poorly camouflaged strictly pragmatic interests of certain states and their pragmatic to the same extent unions have come to the foreground. The subject of the argument in the global “championship” of states, countries and nations is not projects for common historical development of the mankind but various cultural and civilization identities. Geopolitical differences prevail over social ones. The place of one historical truth was taken by many truths from various cultures. Division into “us” and “them” turns out to be incomparably more important than division according to the criterion of justice. The very focus of public consciousness changes from social time to geopolitical space. Respectively, ideas of a more perfect future lose their socially motivating role and give way to the striving to get settled in the present according to the proverb: half a loaf is better than no bread. People are more concentrated on the past and arguments about it than the future, they more eagerly single one what distinguishes their culture from other cultures than what unites it with them. Interest to religious and other mystic ideas taking the issue of the future beyond life in this world, has grown considerably. The curtailment of public consciousness is found not only in thematic priorities and propagandist emphasis of people serving the sector of ideology, it has also become a daily factor. This is expressed, for example, in changing the generally accepted canon of human expectations and goals, evidently becoming pragmatically reduced and privately focused. Surely, some common goals and strategic plans are articulated at the national level, they have some administrative and other meaning in the managerial process, however, they have no individual meaning and do not take an important place in the system of value priorities people are guided by in their behaviour. And these goals and plans as such, being pragmatically focused (close-looped on the electoral cycle and other aspects of political situation), do not suppose such immediate lively response. For example, in May 2018, the President of the Russian Federation set the task to become one of the five leading global economies by 2024. It is an important task, directly tied with the future of the country. But it’s very difficult to imagine a real inter-individual situation

(a meeting of friends, table talk, spontaneous argument, parents talking, etc.) when people could start discussing that. It's impossible to imagine it even as a joke or an amusing story, keeping in mind that this is not the first time-limit set for this goal.

There is an impression that focusing on the historical future, ideal restructuring of the society disappears from the public consciousness of modern developed and emerging countries (shifting to the periphery). The historical (social) future merges with the physical future and performs as the going on present. This change is of a fundamental character, it means a principally new way of human being. It is generated by various factors and has contradictory consequences, not only negative. In particular, it also certifies the high level of intellectual and social maturity of a contemporary man. The comprehension of the fact that the historical future can't be cognized stands behind it, achieved through suffering and tragic experience. And not only because it does not exist as some condition and it can't be the object of cognition, it is stated, created by activities of people, moreover, activities of practically infinite numbers of them that the obtained aggregate result turns out to be their unpredictable resultant force. The future of the society can't be cognized not only on the whole but also in individuals and separate events. It can't be predicted or foreseen either with precision that could be at least approximately scientifically acceptable (this is one of the reasons why various kinds of fortunetelling on stars, coffee grounds, bird flights and cries, palmistry, spodomancy and other nonsense stay so popular). And as L.N. Tolstoy wrote, "It's not enough that people are not given the knowledge as to what form the future life of the society will take: people feel bad because they think that they can know it"¹. A false though tempting goal of the wonderful future becomes the source of unproductive use of social energy. Besides, as a rule, it serves as justification of excessive cruelties and vain sacrifices: appealing to the happy future is one of the most favourite arguments to which advocates of wars and other forms of state violence refer to. Combination of one and the other leads to the so-called cognition or foreseeing the future becoming an ideologeme that most

¹ Tolstoy L.N. About the Importance of the Russian Revolution // Complete Works in 90 volumes. V. 36. Moscow: Goslitizdat, p. 352.

often turns into its opposite. A vivid illustration of it is literary utopias from which the New Times started, turning into real anti-utopias of the 20th century.

Refusal from the future as some more or less but always uncertain far-off in time condition of the society does not necessarily mean a kind of escapism, asceticism or any other beyond-the-social, anti-social position. This can be a fairly active and to a highest extent realistic position in relation to the future, understanding it as what it really is – some state that will come after the present. Because of that the attitude to it is the transformed (indirect) form of the attitude to the present, expression of the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with it, first of all, the degree of criticality in relation to the present. An individual does not know the future, he can deceive himself or be deceived by the others as to what it will be, but he knows, he knows well and definitely what it should not be, he knows what is unacceptable for him in the present and what he does not want to see under no circumstances reproduced in time. And this knowledge has a direct impact on the degree, character and focus of his social activities, his thoughts and actions, being a form of his current active state, it is at the same time his actual attitude to the future, his working for the future. For example, there may be different images of the future but in all cases not a single sensible man at the modern level of humanitarian consciousness, will agree to include violence and wars in it as a norm. Even those who justify these barbarian forms of relations between people, referring to their necessity as the condition for struggle for the just future, do that deceiving themselves that this is done as if for such a future, in which there will be no violence and wars. The most cruel and inhuman wars as both world wars in the 20th century were, were waged under a false conviction that each of them was the last one.

3.

Now, it is possible to see a new structure of responsibility behind the loss of historical perspective as the dominant of public consciousness. Individual and moral responsibility is dominating in this structure over social and functional responsibility, and is being primary in relation to it. It means that an individual realizes himself as a

creature with the mind and will, he realizes his aiming at perfection, at ideal completeness, within the framework of responsible existence that surely includes social (material) responsibility as well, but as a secondary attached aspect. It means that when acting, performing some or the other social function, an individual does not act anonymously but personally, not on behalf of the function but on his behalf. Any social action is the action of this certain individual. There is always a live soul behind it, not only in the sense that without it, a live soul, without its decision and decisiveness to do this it's impossible to act, the action would not have taken place – this action done by the individual, no matter how much conditioned it is from the outside, is his subjective act, his decision and it becomes a moment in the history of his soul. In his time (in 1902), Leo Tolstoy wrote a letter to Tsar Nicholas II addressing him with the words “Beloved brother!”. The meaning was as follows: “No matter how great your responsibility is during the years of your reign, when you can do a lot of good things and a lot of evil things, your responsibility to God for your life here is even bigger, your eternal life depends on it and it was given to you by God not to sanction all kinds of evil deeds or participate in them and allow them, but do His will. And His will is to do not evil but good to people”². This unbelievable letter, which at first sight seems even an exceptional case, is interesting because Tolstoy, with an ultimate case as an example, bares in it a certain, individually responsible logic of human existence: even an autocrat, who alone personifies the state, acts as an individual, he can't justify his cruelty and other evil deeds, camouflaging them as the good for the state, society, history, motherland and other anonymous ideas and notions deprived of independent subjectivity. Surely, refusal from hypnosis of the future does not necessarily lead to individually responsible social behaviour, it may combine with consumerism, cynicism, other forms of egoism, however, in contrast to the latter that can fairly well take place also within the framework of deceitful and demagogic attitude to the future, individually responsible social behaviour is directly connected with such refusal.

² Tolstoy L.N. Letter to Nicholas the Second // Tolstoy L.N. Complete Works in 90 volumes. V. 73. Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1954, p. 190.

In a nutshell, if striving for the ideal, for perfection can't be realized as a sociological project and, if addressed to the future, disorients human behaviour, there is no obstacle to it to be individual life programs of certain individuals showing themselves in the world as sovereign autonomous persons.

In this connection – several words about digitalization that is in fashion now. It is thought that storage and transfer of information based on artificial intelligence in a digital form opens unbelievable technological prospects allowing to control and infinitely expand human capabilities in all fields of human vital activities. They are speaking about transfer of all technology of life to smart machines, complete and even many times more perfect replacement of a man performing his physical and mental (intellectual) functions. The range of human freedom expands principally, the Internet allows an individual to overcome physical attachment to space and time as well as be included in network communities, directly realizing his social preferences. Digitalization can be viewed as a technical basis for individualization of social life, when an individual can't be lost in a crowd, hide his social face in anonymousness of a historical event and when, on the other hand, he, being alone (e.g. in his country house) can be in the center of events (e.g. listen to a colleague's report in the other end of the globe or take part in a civil action).

However, digitalization is not only inspiring opportunities but ominous dangers as well. As academician V.A. Lektorsky³ mentions, it means challenge and threat to the basic conditions of human existence. Prospects tied with prolongation of physical existence up to bringing into life the idea of immortality threaten with the loss of human identity, man's transfer into a different, not human condition. Possibilities of thought-reading by way of direct information reading from neurodynamic codes of the brain threaten with total control over behaviour. The border between private and public space is already being blurred now, as a result of which privacy is under a

³ He writes in his paper "Are Sciences of Man Possible?" (*Philosophical Issues*, 2015, No. 5): "New circumstances are becoming clearer and clearer: modern sciences of man can create a principally different human development level but they under certain circumstances can be used for degrading a man, his dehumanization – in this case it will turn out that exactly development of sciences of man will lead to disappearance, death of a human being in the usual for us sense". (http://vphil.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1153&Itemid=52)

threat. It's an evident fact that technology development is connected with development of dangers coming from it. The critical point was achieved by creation of nuclear weapons that put the humankind on the edge of self-destruction. New technologies, as far as they can be judged, still more evidently emphasize the critical stage when dangers associated with them make their positive results senseless because of the scales and irreversibility.

It is characteristic of humans to risk, to play with fire (according to Russian poet A.S. Pushkin, "everything, everything that threatens death, is fraught with unexplainable pleasures for a mortal's heart..."), there is a striving in human nature to reign over the world (according to Russian poet M.Yu. Lermontov, "I'm the tsar of cognition and freedom"), be its center, look at it with God's eyes. After all, all culture is the tireless and comprehensive experience of taming nature, controlling it. Because of that the process of technological progress, increasing technological power and human productive capabilities up to the aspiration to surmount oneself, should be accepted if not as a benefit, then as a fact. It seems that the only way to oppose this humankind's movement towards its death is advancement of the old and development of some new safety mechanisms capable to block, relieve or smooth dangers brought by progress.

All good things have something evil in them. One can't exist without the other. However, it's important for them to preserve different meanings and for relations between them to be unidirectional, in order for the evil not to acquire independence, staying dependent on the good, its expression and supplement. That, unfortunately, does not always happen, the evil can tear its umbilical cord tying it to the good, lay claims to be equivalent with it. This refers to social experience as much as to individual experience. It's like imperfections and flaws in an individual that can be and most often are the continuation of his merits and virtues, but sometimes they are independent traits of character as a result of which this individual himself becomes the victim of his character. The same is in the society where flaws that inevitably accompany achievements (e.g. unemployment accompanying market economy) are

tied with them so inseparably that achievements as such would be impossible without them. But at the same time, some social flaws do not have direct connection with achievements (e.g. slave trade in today's world) and represent the evil as such. Social mechanisms called to restrain, clean, eliminate the evil in the society should take into account the character and scales of the evil, first of all the said difference between the evil accompanying the good and because of that tolerable, susceptible to softening, and "autonomous" evil opposing the good as an independent force and challenging it.

If you take the general approach to fighting the socially dangerous evil, practiced in contemporary societies, it is based on two principles: a) conviction that well-being of the society (state, nation, future, etc.) is more important than well-being of individuals, and b) assuredness that it is necessary to separate the wheat from the chaff and reject individuals being a threat to the society (state) and create such outside socioeconomic, political, legal and other conditions and limitations that could restrain negative actions of individuals and their groups at the level acceptable for reproduction and development of the society. Such an approach was effective while the evil in the society was not of the absolute character and was not able to threaten the existence of the society as such, especially existence of the humankind and all life on Earth. Currently, the state of affairs changed and such potentially absolute (absolutely unacceptable) evil manifested itself. Nuclear weapons are the most striking but not the only example of technological "progress", containing a possibility of the evil capable to destroy all achievements of culture and civilization, even all life on Earth. The most important is that such an evil with its irreversible, deadly for the humankind and life on Earth consequences can be launched by certain individuals. If in the past possibilities of evil deeds by certain individuals (the so-called evil geni, be it at the criminal or state level) were technically limited, now they are technically possible. It means that it's impossible to oppose such evil without refusing from the dominant false views as if well-being of the society is more important than well-being of individuals, and people's actions can be assuredly taken under outside control. The whole history of the humankind undoubtedly shows and proves that the

evil was very often and on giant scales done under the camouflage and in the name of common well-being and that it is not possible to fully control people's actions from the outside even when they are brought down to the slave level of speaking weapons. Sure, not everything done under the banner of common well-being is evil, but in the case that is of interest to us, it's enough that the evil is also fairly capable to camouflage with the help of it. We can even say: it's not necessary for the good to appeal to common well-being, and the evil can't do without it. For example, why can't there be a fanatic thinking that burning in the global fire will be a real benefit for the humankind?! As for a possibility of a continuous (lacunae free) outside determination of individuals' decisions and actions, the argument that it is excluded by the idea of free will is enough. And if our fanatic gets an opportunity to realize his insane idea, what can stop him from doing it?!

A new humanitarian turn based on principally other principles can be an adequate answer to global dangers, potentially embedded in abuse of unlimited opportunities provided by technological progress. They are: a) individual well-being is more important than well-being of all, b) personal (moral) responsibility is more important than social (functional) responsibility. We're speaking about the fundamental change of moral bases of people's cohabitation, proceeding from the fact that people are not in command of people and the society does not dominate over individuals, binding and holding them by outside hoops of laws, borders, ideologies, norms, authorities, heroes, etc. and is an expression and consequence of free development of each of them. If we speak about real prophecies for such a change, they are unfortunately painfully few, but they do exist. We can mention teachings and practices (Tolstoy's and his followers' nonresistance to the evil by force, non-violent social and political movements led by Gandhi and King, other non-violent tests) of radical (not allowing any exceptions) refusal from violence as means of resolving conflicts, including, first of all, as means of fighting for justice. We can also refer to the complex, contradictory but nevertheless absolutely definite in its prevailing trend and opening new humanitarian prospects ethical and legal practice of human rights.

The world with no wars or violence, no armed detachments protecting “sacred” borders and privileges, in which individual responsibility and individual development of everyone are the basis and condition for development of all, is perceived by a modern man and canonized humanitarian knowledge at best as an unattainable utopia. It seems utopian and is utopian from the perspective of today’s world which it rejects. And an individual in today’s world, not imagining his life and well-being without basing on violence, can’t think differently. However, this utopia is realistic, realistic to the highest degree because exclusively the reasonable will is its basis and guarantee, and because it is the only chance for human self-preservation as a sensible being and the humankind as a sensibly organized community. And originating new technological opportunities, with digitalization being the impressive manifestation of them, allow to suppose that this utopia is realistic from the technological perspective as well.